



Neighborhood Tokyo

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THEODORE C. BESTOR

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For Arthur and Dorothy

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No dedication can do justice to the patience of loved ones.

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I remain, however, solely responsible for the findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this book.

T.C.B.

Explanatory Note

All Japanese terms are romanized in the modified Hepburn system used in *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* (4th ed., 1974). Japanese names are listed in the Western fashion, personal name first and family name second. I have created pseudonyms for Miyamoto-chō and the names of all organizations, institutions, and persons in the neighborhood past or present to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of neighborhood residents. The identities of residents are further disguised by the alteration of minor details of age, occupation, or family background. All translations from Japanese sources are my own.

I have adopted the convention of referring to residents of Miyamoto-chō as "Mr. Takahashi" or "Mrs. Horie." I do so to convey some flavor of the formality with which neighborhood residents address one another; personal names are almost never used except among relatives and the most intimate friends. In almost all contexts when referring to or addressing people other than one's relatives, the suffix *san* is obligatory. To have rendered residents' names with *san*, however, might confuse readers accustomed to the linguistic differentiation of gender. Other suffixes used in forms of address, such as *chan* (a diminutive form of *san*), *kun* (a masculine form that teachers and neighbors use in addressing boys, and that business executives use to refer to their close male subordinates), and *sama* (an exalted form of

san, often used when referring to deities), do not have graceful English equivalents, and so appear unaltered in this book.

I have also retained the honorific *sensei* ("master" or "teacher"), a term of respect that replaces *san* after the family name. Like *san*, *sensei* is used only by others when they speak someone else's name (never one's own or a relative's). *Sensei* is applied to the names of schoolteachers, instructors of traditional dance and tea ceremony, university professors, television commentators, and politicians.

At several places I refer to the Japanese National Railway, the backbone of Tokyo's transportation system. In 1987 the railway was privatized; it is now universally known by the English initials "JR" for Japan Railway.

In discussions of money I have not given dollar equivalents for yen amounts, because changing exchange rates over the past several generations would distort relative values expressed in dollars. Before the Second World War, the exchange rate remained stable for several decades at roughly two yen to the dollar. During the American Occupation the exchange rate was arbitrarily set at 360 yen to the dollar, at which level it remained until the early 1970's. During my fieldwork the rate fluctuated between about 190 and 230, and, as I complete the manuscript, in early 1988, it stands at about 125.

Throughout the book I refer to the following conventional eras of Japanese history: Tokugawa period (1603–1868); Meiji period (1868–1912); Taishō period (1912–26); and Shōwa period (1926–1989).

NEIGHBORHOOD TOKYO

Form is possibility

—*Cecil Taylor, jazz pianist*

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Introduction

OLDER SECTIONS of Japanese cities often are divided into well-defined neighborhoods. These are not merely administrative devices (such as postal zones or police precincts) that correspond only slightly to the social categories and groupings important in the daily lives of most residents. Nor do such neighborhoods exist primarily as eponymic emblems or symbols of larger social divisions of the city, such as New Yorkers might have in mind when referring to Wall Street, Williamsburg, and the West Village; or San Franciscans when talking of the Tenderloin, Nob Hill, and North Beach. Instead these Tokyo neighborhoods are geographically compact and spatially discrete, yet at times almost invisible to the casual observer. Socially they are well organized and cohesive, each containing a few hundred to a few thousand residents.

In the vastness of Tokyo these are tiny social units, and by the standards that most Americans would apply, they are perhaps far too small, geographically and demographically, to be considered "neighborhoods." Still, to residents of Tokyo and particularly to the residents of any given subsection of the city, they are socially significant and geographically distinguishable divisions of the urban landscape. In neighborhoods such as these, overlapping and intertwining associations and institutions provide an elaborate and enduring framework for local social life, within